The World of Letters as Others See It

Dreiser at the Turning Point.

DRUDGING along as I was at the most inconsequential of tasks, I was haunted by the thought that in reality I was a misfit, that I might have to give up and return to the West, where in some pathetic humdrum task I should eke out a barren and pointless life. In view of this probable end or result I now began to think that I must not give up, but must instead turn to letters, the art of short story writing. Only just how I was to do this I could not see. I had never written a short story in my life and did not really believe that I could learn how. Yet one of the things that prompted me to do so was the fact that on this very paper at the time, or so I understood, were several who had succeeded in that or in allied fields — David Graham Phillips for one, and James Creelman, then a correspondent for the paper at the war which had broken out between China and Japan, to say nothing of George Cary Eggleston and Reginald de Koven, the latter on the staff as chief musical critic. There was another young man, whose name I have forgotten, who was said to be a rapidly growing favorite in the offices of the *Century*. Then there were those new arrivals in the world of letters, Kipling, Richard Harding Davis, Stephen Crane, and some others, whose success if not work always fascinated me.—*From "Out of My Newspaper Days." By Theodore Dreiser in "The Bookman."*

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W. S. Gilbert and the English Æsthetes.

THE last of the four operas produced at the Opera Comique was "Patience," and it ran from April 23, 1881, till October of the same year, when the company was transferred to the Savoy. We approach the great period. "Patience" was already tremendously popular. Every one was agreed that the æsthetes were becoming a nuisance; there was a powerful reaction toward the more

> . . . commonplace type
> With a stick and a pipe
> And a half-bred black and tan,

and Gilbert was the man to lead it. If his shafts were aimed at any one man in particular that man was Oscar Wilde, but Grossmith, as *Bunthorne*, must have looked a good deal more like Whistler. Anyhow, the public was delighted. If the opera had not contained a single topical allusion it would have deserved to have succeeded on its music alone. But D'Oyly Carte was not satisfied—neither with the success of the play nor with the fact, growing daily more apparent, that he had hit upon a unique form of entertainment that was certain to make his fortune as well as those of the two authors.—*From "Gilbert and Sullivan." By Clennell Wilkinson in the London "Mercury."*

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An English View of Bret Harte's America.

IT is no longer possible to look on Bret Harte with the eyes that greeted him as a delightful portent revealing, in all their freshness, an adventurous community, a picturesque type of character and a native humor hitherto undiscovered. He is now a survival, almost a classic; his interest has become historical instead of topical. The America that he knew has disappeared, both the sober East and the roaring West; Poker Flats are no more, Indians no longer roam, pioneers clad in red shirts and patched trousers and sustained by the indigestible diet of fried pork and flapjacks no longer make the first hideous gashes in the beautiful flank of Nature. The touchy sense of personal honor and the respect for manliness even in crime are changed, with the dialect, into something else; and the provincialisms of which America now loves to read are those of struggling townships among the vast cornfields of the West, where souls long for any adventure to lift them out of a dreary monotony, and the "Dutchman" is almost the equivalent for Ah Sin.—*From the London "Times."*

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Rousseau's Influence in America.

OUR life, apparently so happy, had its shadows. One of my five brothers, a veritable Prodigal Son, saddened our hearts. He was constantly absent, but the whole province spoke of his tumultuous life at Dgiguit. At home we avoided speaking his name, so much were we pained by his extravagant adventures, which surpassed all imagining. It was he alone of all the children to whom my father had given a European education, following the ideas of Jean Jacques Rousseau, whom my father had believed equal to Buddha. Weary of his great learning, unable any longer to love the little joys of life, my father completely shared the disgust which Rousseau felt for civilization, the corrupter of nature. He had agreed with Rousseau that we should return to the primitive state and allow our instincts to develop freely. And, according to Rousseau, if any one possessed an evil instinct punishment was unnecessary, for he would be punished directly by the inevitable consequences of his actions. In order not to influence my brother with our Asiatic customs my father kept him apart from us in a solitary lodge.—*By Armen Ohanian in "Asia."*

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Literary Associations of Stockbridge, Mass.

STOCKBRIDGE and its neighborhood had been for years famous for its distinguished inhabitants, including Catherine Sedgwick, G. P. R. James, Henry W. Longfellow, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville, Fanny Kemble and Cyrus W. and David Dudley Field. Most of these celebrities had disappeared when I arrived, but the New England tradition of neatness and cleanliness had expressed itself in the founding of the Laurel Hill Association, the first of the village improvement societies that are to be found to-day in nearly every small community in the land. It was in Stockbridge that I met the first of the long line of famous writers whom it has been my privilege to know in the person of Mrs. Harriet Beecher Stowe, whose daughter was the wife of the local Episcopal clergyman. Her husband, the Rev. Calvin E. Stowe, was with her and I recall with delight his humorous darky stories. The old home of G. P. R. James of "solitary horseman" fame stood, and perhaps still stands, over the way from what is now the Red Lion Inn.—*From "Early Memories of New England." By James L. Ford in "Scribner's Magazine."*

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A New Era of French "Best Sellers."

NEVER before have books in France been printed to the extent that they are now being printed. For a long time it was thought that the record established by Zola would never be equaled. In the years preceding the war that record was regarded as astonishing. Now some of our novelists are beating that record with first books. Zola figures were: "La Debacle," 260,000; "La Terre," 247,000; "L'Assommoir," 194,000; "Nana," 160,000. Later came "Cyrano de Bergerac," to sell 538,000; "L'Aiglon," to sell 406,000; "Les Desenchantees," to sell 332,000, and "Le Lys Rouge," to sell 326,000. Other figures: Louis Hemon's "Maria Chapdelaine" (now a conspicuous "best seller" in the United States.—Ed.), 349,000; Barbusse's "Le Feu," 336,000, and Barbusse's "L'Enfer," 284,000. "L'Atlantide" has reached 150,000, "Les Croix de Bois" 150,000, Rene Maran's "Batoula" has passed the 100,000 and Ernest Perochon's "Nene" the 75,000.—*Translated from "L'Opinion" of Paris.*

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Briton Thinks This Real 'Americanese.'

IT is said that Mr. Wodehouse is the only Englishman who ever learned to write Americanese. There is a fine example of this power in his American exile's thrilling account of a baseball match:

". . . Now pay attention. Play ball! Pitcher's winding up. Put it over, Mike, put it over! Some speed, kid! Here it comes right in the groove. Bing! Batter slams it and streaks for first. Outfielder—this lump of sugar—boots it. Bonehead! Batter touches second. Third? No! Get back! Can't be done. Play it safe. Stick 'round the sack, old pal. Second batter up. Pitcher getting something on the ball now besides the cover. Whiffs him. Back to the bench, Cyril! Third batter up. See him rub his hands in the dirt. Watch this kid. He's good! Lets two alone, then slams the next right on the nose. Whizzes round to second. First guy, the one we left on second, comes home for one run. That's a game! Take it from me, Bill, that's a game!'"—*From "The Humor of P. G. Wodehouse." By Sidney Dark in "John o' London's Weekly."*

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The Half Forgotten Ouida.

DR. WILLIAMSON says that "The Massarenes," which Ouida published in 1897, was regarded by the authoress as the best book she had ever written. From this opinion Dr. Williamson dissents. He thinks that the best of her books is "Bimbi," or at least that "Bimbi" contained some of her best work. She thought it a volume of trivial importance compared with others. I have not read all the books of Ouida, but of those I have read I think "The Massarenes" much the best, full of determined and deadly hatred and charged with the purposes and properties of poison. Nevertheless it was written with remarkable vigor and carried the reader on. Dr. Williamson speaks gently of poor Ouida's eccentricities which ended so sadly. She had been very extravagant and became crippled in means. She had a great contempt for most of the world and hated all modern movements. Dr. Williamson says: "I do not think that Ouida in person could ever have been pretty, but when I saw her she was undoubtedly impressive because her complexion was of extreme beauty, pink and white like that of a young girl."—*From the "British Weekly."*

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Authors as Husbands.

A PASSAGE in one of Mrs. Oliphant's letters helps to bear out the Rev. W. Major Scott's contention that authors make unsatisfactory husbands. Writing to Dr. Story in 1866, Mrs. Oliphant describes "a visit from Mrs. Carlyle, who is looking very feeble and picturesque, and naturally has been taking away everybody's character, or perhaps I ought to say throwing light upon the domestic relations of distinguished people of the period. I was remarking upon the eccentricity of the said relations, and could not but say that Mr. Carlyle seemed the only virtuous philosopher we had. Upon which his wife answered: "My dear, if Mr. Carlyle's digestion had been stronger there is no saying what he might have been.'"—*From the "Manchester Guardian."*

The Passing of the Old West.

UP to the last ten years the Western United States had to be romantic or nothing. Hamlin Garland has recorded his difficulties in getting the West he knew into print. No doubt there was romance in the West. Remington and Russell drew what they saw. Owen Wister and Stewart Edward White did not have to call on imagination overmuch; many of the jests they wrote down were known from the Rio Grande to the Peace River. (Will Rogers, with his dry, careless wit, his unjaded eye, his poise and pungency, is the concentrated essence of the "romantic West," if you like to call it that. Seeing him sandwiched between Dolores and the Dolly Sisters in a Ziegfeld revue one ponders the word.) But White and Wister were just in time to see the curtain fall. B. M. Bower gives her hero an airplane now instead of a broncho. The old West has vanished as utterly as the America of Chateaubriand's day—which at that had little resemblance to the Arcadian wilderness through which Rene took his melancholy pilgrimage. Willa Cather may write of the true romance of Nebraska's farms, Sinclair Lewis can show the drabness of Gopher Prairie, without fear of rebuke.—*From "The Absentee Novelists of Canada." By Isabel Paterson in "The Bookman."*

What You Should Know About American Authors

IV.
KATE DOUGLAS WIGGIN.

KATE DOUGLAS WIGGIN has been happily summed up as one of those writers who even in doing quite ordinary things does them in an extraordinary way. In other words, she is independent of striking plot, of breadth of canvas. She touches the heart and she appeals to the memory because she has in abundance the power of making the simplest lives seem beautiful; because she has written only of the life that has passed before her eyes, and because, from the first story she wrote, which appeared in *St. Nicholas* in 1878; she has preserved her clear directness of narration and unaffectedness of form. In thinking of her work the reader thinks of three settings: the New England of her girlhood, which she has somewhere described as "all the years that count most"; the California she learned to know, when after her graduation from the Abbot Academy at Andover she joined her family at Santa Barbara, and the various parts of the British Isles that are associated with the journeyings and adventures of her charming Penelope.

Kate Douglas Wiggin.

But if her settings are few her appeal is wide. There is a collection of her books that are printed in foreign lands. It includes "The Birds' Christmas Carol" in Japanese, "Timothy's Quest" in Danish and "Timothy's Quest," "Polly Oliver's Problem" and "The Birds' Christmas Carol" in one volume in Swedish. The French translations of "The Birds' Christmas Carol," "A Cathedral Courtship" and others are in bound volumes of the magazines. There is a German edition of "Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm." There is also an edition of "Rebecca" in English that before the war was used in the Berlin public schools. It contains a glossary that Mrs. Riggs describes as "precious beyond words." "The Birds' Christmas Carol," "The Story of Patsy" and "Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm" are all printed in raised type for the blind, and eight of Mrs. Riggs's books were to be found in the old Tauchnitz library. Nor is her popularity to be measured entirely in terms of longitude and latitude. Rudyard Kipling has always been one of her admirers, considering "Polly Oliver's Problem" to be her best book. For the encouragement of aspiring and unrecognized authors it may be added here that "Timothy's Quest," which has been one of her greatest successes and which has been translated into half a dozen languages (in Danish its title is "Tim og Gay"), had the honor of being refused by six leading publishing houses.

Born in Philadelphia, brought up in New England and going to the Pacific coast when she was 18 years of age, Kate Douglas Wiggin's love for and interest in children first manifested itself in kindergarten work. Her association with that work began in San Francisco and was continued later in New York. When visiting the kindergartens she used to join in the children's games and tell them stories. To that experience, she says, she owes the inspiration of her literary work.

In a preceding paragraph the subject of this sketch has been referred to as Mrs. Riggs. She is that by virtue of her second marriage. Born Kate Douglas Smith, she married first a young lawyer of California, and in 1895 Mr. George C. Riggs. Here are two pictures of her in her younger life, the first a passage of reminiscence by her talented sister, Nora Archibald Smith:

"My sister was certainly a capable little person at a tender age, concocting delectable milk toast, browning toothsome wheat cakes and generally making a very good parents' assistant. I have visions of her toiling at patchwork and overseeing sheets like a nice old fashioned little girl in a story book. Further to illustrate her personality I think no one much in her company at any age could have failed to note an exceedingly lively tongue and a general air of executive ability. If I am to be truthful I must say that I recall few indications of budding authorship, save an engrossing diary (kept for six months only) and a devotion to reading. Her "literary passions" were "The Arabian Nights," "The Scottish Chiefs," "Don Quixote," "Thaddeus of Warsaw," Irving's "Mahomet," Thackeray's "Book of Snobs," "Undine" and "The Martyrs of Spain." These and others, joined to an old green Shakespeare and a plum pudding edition of Dickens, were the chief of her diet."

Here is a picture of Kate Douglas Wiggin twenty-five years ago:

"Mrs. Wiggin carries on a most voluminous correspondence, as she feels consciously constrained to answer every letter that she receives. It is touching to hear of some of the letters which have been sent to her from remote parts of the globe by those who have read her books. As she does not use a typewriter and does all her own writing one can see how severely Mrs. Wiggin is taxed by this self-imposed service. But no doubt in this way Mrs. Wiggin's influence is as extensive as it has been through her books. Although her abode is in New York she does all her writing at her country home, which stands on the Saco, about sixteen miles from Portland, Me.—Quillcote, as she calls it, which is the nearest she could get to the "home of a pen woman." Much of her writing is done in the summer months in the open air under the gnarled branches of the "dear old apple tree" to which, it will be remembered, she dedicated the 'Village Watch Tower.'"

Here is a list of the books of Kate Douglas Wiggin in their chronological order:

Bird's Christmas Carol, 1886; A Summer in a Canon, 1889; The Story of Patsy, 1889; Timothy's Quest, 1890; The Story Hour, 1890; A Cathedral Courtship, 1893; Polly Oliver's Problem, 1893; Froebel's Gifts, 1895; The Village Watch Tower, 1895; Marm Lisa, 1896; Froebel's Occupations, 1896; Kindergarten Principles and Practice, 1896; Nine Love Songs and a Carol, 1896; Penelope's Progress, 1897; Penelope's Experiences in Ireland, 1900; The Diary of a Goose Girl, 1901; Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm, 1903; The Affair at the Inn, 1904; New Chronicles of Rebecca, 1907; Homespun Tales, 1907; Robinetta, 1910; Mother Carey's Chickens, 1911; A Child's Journey with Dickens, 1912; The Story of Waitstill Baxter, 1913; Penelope's Postscripts, 1915; Romance of a Christmas Card, 1916; Anthology of Mother Verse, 1917, and Ladies in Waiting, 1919.